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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004382

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/11/2013

TAGS: PGOV PREL TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: JULY 11 REACTIONS TO IRAQ INCIDENT

(U) Classified by DCM Robert S. Deutsch. Reason:1.5(b)(d)

¶1. (U) Summary: sensationalist reporting on the July 4 detentions of Turkish Special Forces (TSF) by U.S. troops continued to fade in the July 11 Turkish press, with the incident pushed off the front pages in several major dailies. Ultra-nationalists, advocating a "reevaluation" of the bilateral relationship, continue publicly and privately to use harsh rhetoric in support of military hard-liners, and to demand a U.S. apology. Nevertheless, despite the rhetoric, since the return of the detainees to Turkish custody, we have not seen any steps towards a break in dialogue or diminution of relations including on commercial military (or non-military) deals. End summary.

U.S. Unapologetic, AK "Rational"

¶2. (U) The front page of the July 11 mainstream mass daily "Hurriyet" reports that General Sylvester, during the meeting of the joint fact-finding commission, acknowledged that the incident was "not a pleasant one," but added that he was "not in a position to apologize."

-- "Hurriyet" theorized that General Sylvester decided to go to northern Iraq only after hearing the reports about the incident presented by the Turks.

-- Mainstream "Sabah" quotes Lieutenant General Koksal Karabay, head of the Turkish team, as saying the incident was "a scandal, no matter what the reason" for the U.S. action.

¶3. (U) Papers highlighted statements by F.M. Gul and P.M. Erdogan that were measured.

-- Gul asserted that Turkish forces "were not involved in a secret mission," and said that the evidence presented by the

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United States thus far was "not persuasive." He added that there was "no chance" that the TSF were operating "outside of the chain of command of the Turkish Armed Forces." Gul claimed that Turkey wants to "work for stability in northern Iraq." He said that the discussions of the fact-finding team were proceeding "based on mutual trust," and predicted that "everything will come out" once the commission has completed its work.

-- In his monthly television address to the nation July 10, Erdogan described the government's approach to the incident as one of "uncompromising realism and determination." He reiterated his earlier assertion that the incident was "ugly"; he also lashed out at those who had criticized the Government for not reacting more forcefully against the USG. Erdogan asserted that the state administration must act "not by emotional reaction," but through "determined and rational steps." On July 11, he also reminded T.V. reporters that the mil/mil commission had not yet reached any conclusions.

¶4. (U) Major commentators were generally moderate. "Hurriyet's" Ferai Tinc, who has frequently criticized U.S. policies in Iraq, stressed the importance of U.S.-Turkish coordination and urged the two sides to reestablish trust between them. Tinc pointed out that a continued lack of coordination in Iraq's restructuring will only strengthen the region's terrorists. Fehmi Koru, a strong U.S. critic in the Islam-oriented "Yeni Safak," stressed the need to restore a "healthy" relationship between Turkey and the United States. Koru urged F.M. Gul to carry through on his planned visit to Washington in coming weeks.

Pro-Military MHP: "Strategic Partnership is Over..."

15. (C) Vice Chairman for the ultra-nationalist MHP Ercument Konukman asserted to us July 11 that the alleged treatment of Turkish soldiers at the hands of U.S. forces was "unacceptable" and demanded that the USG apologize publicly. He suggested that the Kurds were beneath the Turks and thus not fit subjects for U.S. protection. Konukman also strongly intimated that members of the MHP's "idealist" cadres (note: the notorious "Ulkuculer") are assisting/working with Turkish military in n. Iraq. The Turkish military, he said, is following the same policy in n. Iraq that it has followed for the last decade; it does not trust the US to protect Turkey's interests. MHP believes Turkey must "reevaluate" its relationship with the U.S., he added. "I'm sorry," Konukman said. "The Strategic Partnership is over."

...But Commercial Dialogue Unaffected So Far

16. (C) Despite calls in the press earlier this week for Turkey to take firm measures including canceling its purchase of 4 AWACs planes from Boeing and reports in yesterday's "Milliyet" that the TGS had been "boycotting" talks on the purchase of King Cobra attack helicopters since July 7 (they were, but since the return of Turkish Special Forces to Turkish custody are now again participating) there is nothing to suggest a break in dialogue on commercial military (or non-military) deals.

17. (C) Comment: The military probably is trying as hard as it can to avoid using these defense contracts as a political tool since any setback could open up the fenced defense procurement funds to claims by AK politicians (including the P.M.) who want the money for social programs. It is worth also noting that the GOT yesterday proposed holding the next meeting of the Economic Partnership Commission in October, a sign that they want to continue dialogue.
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